

**Expansiveness, entropy and polynomial growth for groups acting on subshifts by automorphisms**

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**ABSTRACT**

Let  $X$  be a closed translationally invariant subset of the  $d$ -dimensional full shift  $P^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$ , where  $P$  is a finite set, and suppose that the  $\mathbb{Z}^d$ -action on  $X$  by translations has positive topological entropy. Let  $G$  be a finitely generated group of polynomial growth. We prove that if  $\text{growth}(G) < d$ , then any  $G$ -action on  $X$  by homeomorphisms commuting with translations is not expansive. On the other hand, if  $\text{growth}(G) = d$ , then any expansive  $G$ -action on  $X$  by homeomorphisms commuting with translations has positive topological entropy. Analogous results hold for semigroups.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The study of automorphisms and endomorphisms (i.e. continuous shift commuting maps, invertible or non-invertible) of the full shift and its subshifts was begun by Hedlund and coworkers [7] and Coven and Paul [2]. In this note we consider an actions of a finitely generated group  $G$  of polynomial growth by automorphisms of a subshift of the  $d$ -dimensional full shift. If the subshift has positive topological entropy, we find that the degree of polynomial growth of the  $G$  may strongly affect certain dynamical properties of the action. More precisely, if  $\text{growth}(G) < d$ , then the action cannot be expansive. On the other hand, if the  $\text{growth}(G)$  is exactly  $d$ , then an expansive action must have positive topological entropy. The results still hold for finitely generated semigroups of polynomial growth acting by endomorphisms on a subshift with positive entropy. In particular, this implies that, firstly, there are no expansive endo- (or

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auto-)morphisms of such subshifts with  $d > 1$  and, secondly, that if  $d = 1$ , then any expansive endo- (or auto-)morphism has positive entropy.

The obstruction to expansiveness we have obtained here supplements, to some extent, the following fact established by A. Fathi.

**Proposition** ([4, Corollary 5.6]). If a compact topological space admits an expansive homeomorphism with zero entropy, then its topological dimension is zero.

## 2. PRELIMINARIES

*Subshifts.* Let  $P$  be a finite set with cardinality  $\text{Card}(P) > 1$ . For any  $d \geq 1$  we put

$$\Omega_d(P) = \{x = (x_n)_{n \in \mathbb{Z}^d} : x_n \in P \text{ for all } n \in \mathbb{Z}^d\}.$$

In other words,  $\Omega_d(P)$  is just the set  $P^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$  of all maps  $x: \mathbb{Z}^d \rightarrow P$ . Provide  $\Omega_d(P)$  with the product topology. Then  $\Omega_d(P)$  is a compact Hausdorff zero-dimensional space. Define, for every  $m \in \mathbb{Z}^d$ , a homeomorphism  $\tau^m: \Omega_d(P) \rightarrow \Omega_d(P)$  by setting  $(\tau^m x)_n = x_{n+m}$  for all  $x \in \Omega_d(P)$  and  $n \in \mathbb{Z}^d$ . The correspondence  $m \mapsto \tau^m$  defines a continuous  $\mathbb{Z}^d$ -action  $\tau$  on  $\Omega_d(P)$ . The pair  $(X, \tau_X)$ , where  $X$  is a closed  $\tau$ -invariant subset of  $\Omega_d(P)$  and  $\tau_X = \tau|_X$  is the restriction of the  $\mathbb{Z}^d$ -action  $\tau$  to  $X$ , is called a *subshift*. A continuous map  $T: X \rightarrow X$  commuting with  $\tau$  (i.e.  $T \circ \tau^m = \tau^m \circ T$  for all  $m \in \mathbb{Z}^d$ ) is called an *automorphism of the subshift* if  $T$  is invertible. If  $T$  is non-invertible it is called an *endomorphism of the subshift*.

*Expansiveness.* Let  $X$  be a compact topological space and let  $G$  be a group acting on  $X$  by homeomorphisms. We denote the action by  $T$  and the homeomorphism corresponding to  $g \in G$  by  $T^g$ . The action  $T$  is said to be *expansive*, if there is a closed neighbourhood  $V \subset X \times X$  of the diagonal  $\Delta_X = \{(x, y) \in X \times X : x = y\}$  such that for  $\hat{T} = T \times T: X \times X \rightarrow X \times X$  we have  $\bigcap_{g \in G} \hat{T}^g V = \Delta_X$ . If the space  $X$  is equipped with a metric  $\varrho$ , then expansiveness means that there is an *expansive constant*  $c > 0$  such that

$$x, y \in X, \quad x \neq y \text{ implies } \varrho(T^g x, T^g y) > c \text{ for some } g \in G.$$

In a similar way one defines (positive) expansiveness for semigroups acting on a compact space by (non-invertible) continuous maps.

*Entropy* (see [9], [5] for details). It is known that a countable group  $G$  is *amenable* if and only if it contains a sequence of finite subsets  $A_1 \subset A_2 \subset \dots \subset A_n \subset \dots \subset G$  with the properties:

- (i)  $\bigcup_{n \geq 1} A_n = G$ ;
- (ii)  $\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} |gA_n \triangle A_n| / |A_n| = 0$  for every  $g \in G$ .

Such a sequence is called *Følner sequence*. Let  $T$  be a continuous action of an amenable group  $G$  on a compact topological space  $X$ . For a finite open cover  $\xi$  of  $X$  and a finite set  $A \subset G$  let  $\xi^A = \bigvee_{g \in A} (T^g)^{-1} \xi$ . For a finite open cover  $\eta$  of  $X$  let  $\mathcal{N}(\eta)$  stand for the minimal cardinality of subcovers of  $\eta$ . Choose a Følner sequence  $\{A_n\}_{n \geq 1}$  in  $G$  and a finite open cover  $\xi$  of  $X$  and define.

$$h(T, \xi) = \limsup_{n \rightarrow \infty} |A_n|^{-1} \log \mathcal{N}(\xi^{A_n}).$$

This value does not depend on the particular Følner sequence  $\{A_n\}_{n \geq 1}$ . Then the topological entropy of the action  $T$  is defined as

$$h(T) = \sup \{h(T, \xi); \xi \text{ is a finite open cover of } X\}.$$

The *topological entropy* for continuous actions of amenable semigroups is defined analogously.

*Groups of polynomial growth* (see [1], [6] for details). Consider a group  $G$  generated by a finite subset  $F \subset G$ . Define the norm  $\|g\|_F$  of an element  $g \in G$  with respect to  $F$  to be the least integer  $l \geq 0$  such that  $g$  can be expressed as a product  $f_1 f_2 \cdots f_l$  with each  $f_i \in F \cup F^{-1}$ . We denote by  $B_F(m)$ ,  $m \geq 1$  the ‘closed’ ball of radius  $m$ , i.e.  $B_F(m) = \{g \in G; \|g\|_F \leq m\}$  and set  $\beta_F(m) = \text{Card}(B_F(m))$ . Following [1], we say that  $G$  has *polynomial growth of degree  $k$*  if there exist constants  $A, C > 0$  such that  $A m^k \leq \beta_F(m) \leq C m^k$  for all  $m \geq 1$ . It is easily seen that this notion does not depend on the choice of  $F$ . In this case we write  $\text{growth}(G) = k$ . One can show that if  $G$  has polynomial growth, then the balls  $B_F(m)$ ,  $m = 1, 2, \dots$  form a Følner sequence in  $G$ , and, therefore,  $G$  is amenable.

For instance, it was proved in [1] (see also [6]) that if  $G$  is a finitely generated nilpotent group with lower central series  $G = G_1 \supset G_2 \supset \cdots \supset G_{p+1} = \{e\}$ , then  $\text{growth}(G) = \sum_{q \geq 1} q r_q$ , where  $r_q = \text{rank}(G_q/G_{q+1})$ . Clearly,  $\text{growth}(\mathbb{Z}^d) = d$ .

In the same manner the degree of polynomial growth can be defined for finitely generated semigroups.

### 3. RESULTS

Let  $G$  be a finitely generated (semi-)group with  $\text{growth}(G) = k$  and  $X \subset \Omega_d(P)$  be a subshift with  $h(\tau_X) > 0$ .

**Theorem 1.** *If  $k = d$ , then for any expansive action  $T$  of the (semi)group  $G$  by automorphisms (endomorphisms) on the subshift  $X$  we have  $h(T) > 0$ .*

**Theorem 2.** *If  $k < d$ , then any action  $T$  of the (semi)group  $G$  by automorphisms (endomorphisms) on the subshift  $X$  is not expansive.*

In the case  $G = \mathbb{Z}^k$  (or  $\mathbb{Z}_+^k$ ) the theorems above describe dynamical properties of the joint action of  $k$  commuting automorphisms (endomorphisms) of the subshift  $X \subset \Omega_d(P)$  according as  $k = d$  or  $k < d$ . In particular for  $G = \mathbb{Z}$  we have

**Corollary 1.** *Let  $d = 1$  and  $X \subset \Omega_1(P)$  be a subshift with  $h(\tau_X) > 0$ . Let  $T$  be an expansive endomorphism or automorphism of  $X$ . Then  $h(T) > 0$ .*

**Corollary 2.** *Let  $d > 1$  and  $X \subset \Omega_d(P)$  be a subshift with  $h(\tau_X) > 0$ . Then there are neither expansive endomorphisms nor expansive automorphisms of  $X$ .*

We remark that if we drop the condition that the entropy of the subshift  $X$  be positive, then the last statement is no longer true. To give a counter example

consider the 2-dimensional subshift of finite type

$$X = \{x \in \Omega_d(\mathbb{Z}/2\mathbb{Z}) : x_{(i,j)} + x_{(i+1,j)} + x_{(i,j+1)} = 0 \pmod{2}, \forall (i,j) \in \mathbb{Z}^2\}.$$

This subshift was first studied by Ledrappier [8] (see also [10]) and was shown to have zero entropy ( $h(\tau_X) = 0$ ). On the other hand one readily verifies that the automorphism  $T = \tau^{(1,1)}|_X$  and the endomorphism  $S$ , defined by  $(Sx)_{(i,j)} = x_{(i-1,j-1)} + x_{(i,j)} + x_{(i+1,j+1)}$  are expansive.

Also, it should be mentioned that our results can be reformulated as follows. Let  $Y$  be an arbitrary compact zero-dimensional topological space and  $m \mapsto \sigma^m$  be a continuous expansive  $\mathbb{Z}^k$ -action on  $Y$ . Then one can construct a finite topological generator (cf. [3], [11])  $\mathcal{U} = \{U_i\}$  with  $U_i \cap U_j = \emptyset$  for  $i \neq j$ , by means of which we define (in the standard way) the topological conjugacy between  $(Y, \tau)$  and a  $d$ -dimensional subshift  $(X, \tau_X)$ . Suppose  $h(\sigma) > 0$  and let  $G$  again be a finitely generated group with  $\text{growth}(G) = k$ . From Theorems 1 and 2, respectively, we have.

**Proposition 1.** *Suppose  $k = d$ . Let  $T$  be an expansive continuous action of the (semi-)group  $G$  on  $Y$  commuting with  $\sigma$ . Then  $h(T) > 0$ .*

**Proposition 2.** *Suppose  $k < d$ . Then any continuous action of the (semi-)group  $G$  on  $Y$  commuting with  $\sigma$  is not expansive.*

#### 4. PROOFS OF THEOREMS 1 AND 2

The proofs will be carried out for the case where  $G$  is a group, the ‘non-invertible’ case where  $G$  is a semigroup is treated similarly.

First we prove the following technical result.

**Lemma 1** (cf. [3]; p. 109). *Let  $T$  be an expansive continuous action of a group  $G$  on a compact metric space  $(X, \varrho)$  and let  $c > 0$  be an expansive constant for  $T$ . Let  $A_1 \subset A_2 \subset \dots \subset A_n \subset \dots \subset G$  be a sequence of subsets of  $G$  such that  $\bigcup_{n \geq 1} A_n = G$ . Then for any  $\delta > 0$  there exists an integer  $M = M(\delta) \geq 1$  such that  $\varrho(x, y) \geq \delta$  implies existence of some  $g \in A_M$  satisfying  $\varrho(T^g x, T^g y) > c$ .*

PROOF. Suppose, on the contrary that for some  $\delta > 0$  there exist sequences  $x_n, y_n \in X$ ,  $n = 1, 2, \dots$  satisfying  $\varrho(x_n, y_n) \geq \delta$  but with  $\varrho(T^g x_n, T^g y_n) \leq c$  for all  $g \in A_n$ . By compactness the sequence  $(x_n, y_n) \in X^2$  contains a convergent subsequence. To avoid double indices we assume that the sequence  $(x_n, y_n)$  itself converges to a pair  $(x, y) \in X^2$ . Take any  $g \in G$ . Then  $g \in A_n$ , and hence  $\varrho(T^g x_n, T^g y_n) \leq c$ , for all sufficiently large  $n$ . Since the action is continuous, we have  $\varrho(T^g x, T^g y) \leq c$ . The last inequality holds for every  $g \in G$  which, in view of expansiveness implies  $x = y$ . But this is impossible, because we must have  $\varrho(x, y) \geq \delta$ . The contradiction proves the lemma.  $\square$

Now we provide the topological space  $\Omega_d(P)$  with a metric. For  $n = (n_1, \dots, n_d)$  we put  $|n| = \max_{1 \leq i \leq d} |n_i|$ . Let  $\alpha$  be a fixed real number with

$0 < \alpha < 1$  and put  $L(x, y) = \min\{|n|: x_n \neq y_n\}$  for  $x \neq y$ . We define the metric  $\varrho_\alpha$  on  $\Omega_d(P)$  by putting

$$P_\alpha(x, y) = \begin{cases} \alpha^{L(x, y)}, & \text{if } x \neq y, \\ 0, & \text{if } x = y. \end{cases}$$

Every subshift  $X \subset \Omega_d(P)$  is given the induced metric.

Then we introduce a family of partitions of  $X$  which will be of substantial use in the proofs of the main results.

Given integers  $a_i \leq b_i$ ,  $1 \leq i \leq d$  define the rectangle

$$R(a, b) = \{n \in \mathbb{Z}^d: a_i \leq n_i \leq b_i \text{ for all } 1 \leq i \leq d\},$$

$a = (a_1, \dots, a_d)$ ,  $b = (b_1, \dots, b_d)$ . We introduce the partition  $\xi(a, b)$  of the space  $\Omega_d(P)$  into compact open sets of the form

$$C(a, b; \hat{u}) = \{x \in \Omega_d(P): x_n = u_n \text{ for all } n \in R(a, b)\},$$

where  $\hat{u} = (u_n)_{n \in R(a, b)} \in P^{R(a, b)}$ . The partition  $\xi(a, b)$  induces a partition of the subshift  $X \subset \Omega_d(P)$  consisting of the non-empty intersections of  $X$  with elements of  $\xi(a, b)$ . We denote this partition of  $X$  by  $\xi_X(a, b)$  and its elements by  $C_X(a, b; \hat{u})$ . Note that the partition may also be considered as an open cover.

Let  $\{R_k = R(a^{(k)}, b^{(k)})\}_{k=1,2,\dots}$  be an increasing sequence of finite rectangles with  $R_k \nearrow \mathbb{Z}^d$ . Then, the topological entropy of the  $\mathbb{Z}^d$ -action  $\tau_X$  on the subshift  $X$  is given by the formula (see [10])

$$(1) \quad h(\tau_X) = \lim_{k \rightarrow \infty} (\text{Card}(R_k))^{-1} \log \text{Card}(\xi_X(a^{(k)}, b^{(k)})),$$

where the limit always exists and does not depend on the sequence  $\{R_k\}$ .

In what follows we write  $\zeta \leq \eta$  for the partitions  $\zeta$  and  $\eta$ , if  $\eta$  is finer than  $\zeta$  and  $\bigvee_{j \in J} \eta_j$  for the refinement of the partitions  $\{\eta_j\}_{j \in J}$ .

Let  $G$  be a finitely generated group with a fixed finite system of generators  $F$ . The proofs of Theorems 1 and 2 are based on the following.

**Lemma 2.** *Let  $X \subset \Omega_d(P)$  be a subshift and  $T$  be an expansive action of the group  $G$  by automorphisms on  $X$  with the expansive constant  $\alpha^{r+1}$  with some  $r \in \mathbb{Z}_+$ . Then there exists an integer  $M \geq 1$  such that*

$$(2) \quad \bigvee_{g \in B_F(M)} (T^g)^{-1} \xi_X(-m, m) \geq \xi_X(-m-1, m+1)$$

for all  $m \geq r$  (where  $m = (m, \dots, m)$ ,  $1 = (1, \dots, 1)$ ).

PROOF. Let us apply Lemma 1 to the action  $T$  on the subshift  $X$  with the metric  $\varrho_\alpha$  taking  $\delta = c = \alpha^{r+1}$  and  $A_n = B_F(n)$ ,  $n = 1, 2, \dots$ . Put  $M = M(\delta)$ . Choose arbitrarily two points  $x, y \in X$  lying in different elements of  $\xi_X(-r-1, r+1)$ . Then  $\varrho(x, y) \geq \alpha^{r+1}$  and, by Lemma 1, we have  $\varrho(T^g x, T^g y) > \alpha^{r+1}$  for some  $g \in B_F(M)$ . This means that  $T^g x$  and  $T^g y$  lie in different elements of the

partition  $\xi_X(-r, r)$ . Hence,  $x$  and  $y$  are in different elements of

$$\bigvee_{g \in B_F(M)} (T^g)^{-1} \xi_X(-r, r),$$

whenever they are in different elements of  $\xi_X(-r-1, r+1)$ . This implies

$$\bigvee_{g \in B_F(M)} (T^g)^{-1} \xi_X(-r, r) \geq \xi_X(-r-1, r+1).$$

Now we prove (2) by induction on  $m$ . Suppose that (2) holds for some  $m \geq r$ . Then, since  $\tau X = X$ , and  $T \circ \tau = \tau \circ T$ , we have

$$\bigvee_{g \in B_F(M)} (T^g)^{-1} \xi_X(-m+j, m+j) \geq \xi_X(-m+j-1, m+j+1)$$

for every  $j \in \mathbb{Z}^d$ . From this it follows that

$$(3) \quad \begin{cases} \bigvee_{g \in B_F(M)} (T^g)^{-1} \xi_X(-m-1, m+1) \geq \bigvee_{g \in B_F(M)} (T^g)^{-1} \xi_X(-m+j, m+j) \\ \geq \xi_X(-m+j-1, m+j+1). \end{cases}$$

for every  $j \in \mathbb{Z}^d$  with  $|j| = 1$ . Obviously,

$$R(-m-2, m+2) = \bigcup_{|j|=1} R(-m+j-1, m+j+1)$$

and, therefore,  $\xi_X(-m-2, m+2) = \bigvee_{j=1} \xi_X(-m+j-1, m+j+1)$ . From this and (3) we have

$$\bigvee_{g \in B_F(M)} (T^g)^{-1} \xi_X(-m-1, m+1) \geq \xi_X(-m-2, m+2).$$

So, we have derived (2) for  $m+1$  which completes the proof.  $\square$

Lemma 2 can be strengthened as follows.

**Lemma 3.** *Under the conditions of Lemma 2 we have*

$$(4) \quad \bigvee_{g \in B_F(sM)} (T^g)^{-1} \xi_X(-m, m) \geq \xi_X(-m-s, m+s)$$

for all  $m \geq r$  and all  $s \geq 1$  (where  $s = (s, \dots, s)$ ).

PROOF. First we observe that for any  $a, b \in \mathbb{N}$  we have

$$B_F(a)B_F(b) = \{g_1 g_2 \in G: g_1 \in B_F(a), g_2 \in B_F(b)\} = B_F(a+b),$$

in particular,  $B_F((s+1)M) = B_F(sM)B_F(M)$ . Using Lemma 2 we write

$$\begin{aligned} & \bigvee_{g \in B_F((s+1)M)} (T^g)^{-1} \xi_X(-m, m) \\ &= \bigvee_{g \in B_F(sM)} (T^g)^{-1} \left( \bigvee_{h \in B_F(M)} (T^h)^{-1} \xi_X(-m, m) \right) \\ &\geq \bigvee_{g \in B_F(sM)} \xi_X(-m-1, m+1), \end{aligned}$$

and (4) follows by induction on  $s$ .  $\square$

Now the proofs of the main theorems are almost immediate.

PROOF OF THEOREM 1. Let  $G$  be a group generated by a finite set  $F \subset G$  with  $\text{growth}(G) = d$  and  $X \subset \Omega_d(P)$  be a subshift with  $h(\tau_X) > 0$ . Let  $T$  be an expansive action of  $G$  by automorphisms on  $X$ . We have  $Am^d \leq \beta_F(m) \leq Cm^d$ ,  $m \geq 1$  with some constants  $A, C > 0$ , where  $\beta_F(m) = \text{Card}(B_F(m))$ . Using Lemma 3 and (1) we find that for any  $m \geq r$

$$\begin{aligned} & h(T, \xi_X(-m, m)) \\ & \geq \limsup_{s \rightarrow \infty} \beta_F(sN)^{-1} \log \mathcal{N} \left( \bigvee_{g \in B_F(sN)} (T^g)^{-1} \xi_X(-m, m) \right) \\ & \geq (2/M)^d \lim_{s \rightarrow \infty} ((sM)^d / \beta_F(sM)) \\ & \quad \times (2(m+s) + 1)^{-d} \log \mathcal{N}(\xi_X(-m-s, m+s)) \geq (2/M)^d C^{-1} h(\tau_X). \end{aligned}$$

Hence,  $h(T) \geq (2/M)^d C^{-1} h(\tau_X)$  and  $h(\tau_X) > 0$  implies  $h(T) > 0$ .  $\square$

PROOF OF THEOREM 2. Let  $G$  be a group generated by a finite set  $F \subset G$  with  $\text{growth}(G) = k < d$  and  $X \subset \Omega_d(P)$  be a subshift with  $h(\tau_X) > 0$ . Suppose  $T$  is an expansive action of  $G$  by automorphisms on  $X$ . Using Lemma 3 again we obtain that for any  $m \geq r$

$$\begin{aligned} & h(T, \xi_X(-m, m)) \\ & \geq \limsup_{s \rightarrow \infty} \beta_F(sN)^{-1} \log N \left( \bigvee_{g \in B_F(sN)} (T^g)^{-1} \xi_X(-m, m) \right) \\ & \geq (2/M)^d \lim_{s \rightarrow \infty} ((sM)^d / \beta_F(sM)) \\ & \quad \times (2(m+s) + 1)^{-d} \log \mathcal{N}(\xi_X(-m-s, m+s)). \end{aligned}$$

Thus, we have  $h(T, \xi_X(-m, m)) = \infty$ , since  $\text{growth}(G) < d$  implies  $(sM)^d / \beta_F(sM) \rightarrow \infty$  and  $(2(m+s) + 1)^{-d} \log \mathcal{N}(\xi_X(-m-s, m+s)) \rightarrow h(\tau_X) > 0$ . But this is impossible in view of the obvious inequality  $h(T, \eta) \leq \log \text{Card}(\eta)$  which holds for any finite open cover  $\eta$ . This contradiction completes the proof.  $\square$

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